

**Reformed Theological Seminary  
ST5250 Ecclesiology and Sacraments  
2026 Syllabus**

**I. Course information**

Class dates:	Feb 5 - May 7, 2026
Class time:	Thursday 8:30am - 11am
Term paper:	April 15 <sup>th</sup>
No class:	March 19 (RTS Spring break) Professor research break TBD
Dinner discussion:	Professor's home; date TBD in first class 5841 Woodleigh Oaks Dr Charlotte NC 28226
Credit hours:	2 (13 class sessions, one in our home)
Contact:	Chad Van Dixhoorn ( <a href="mailto:cvandixhoorn@rts.edu">cvandixhoorn@rts.edu</a> )
Office hours:	In the Spring term I plan to be in my office regularly on Wednesday and Thursday, and frequently on Tuesdays. Contact me for (1) personal matters, (2) class content related questions. Please try valiantly to meet me during those three days, but email Faith Key ( <a href="mailto:fkey@rts.edu">fkey@rts.edu</a> ) for scheduled in-person appointments or appointments at other times in the week. If you have a question about the class, please ensure that you have read the syllabus carefully first.

**II. Course catalogue description**

This course explores biblical doctrine from a systematic perspective. Topics include Ecclesiology and Sacraments.

**III. Course overview**

**A. Course Objectives**

- (1) To understand the history of ecclesiology and polity in the Christian church.
- (2) To grasp the biblical principles informing a church government reformed according to the Scriptures.
- (3) To grasp the biblical and ecclesiological principles grounding an understanding and administration of the sacraments, reformed according to the Scriptures.

**B. In class**

Ecclesiology is one of the most neglected topics in the theological encyclopedia. In this class both lectures and readings argue for the importance of this theological topic, and argue for a

reformed and presbyterian understanding of ecclesiology as that which best expresses the teaching of the scriptures on church governance.

I recognize that some students will come from various episcopalian or congregationalist (including non-denominational, associated and “networked”) church backgrounds, or will have had widely differing experiences of church governance - good, neutral or even very bad. This course will be sensitive to the practical benefits and liabilities of different forms of church government, but will be focused principally in determining the best biblical and theological grounding for our ecclesiology.

Our ecclesiology grounds both our church polity and our worship, and it is in part for this reason that the topic of sacraments is tethered to this course on ecclesiology. The sacraments are also included here because of the intimate connection between the membership of the church and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper. With the sacraments, too, a classically reformed perspective will be presented. It is my hope that students will be grateful to God for the Bible’s teaching on the subject, and that any unconvinced students will still be edified and enriched in a better understanding of an important Christian tradition.

Recommended reading for class conduct: Samuel Miller, [\*Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits\*](#), (New York: G&C Carvill, 1927), Letter IX. Dated, but with some thoughtful points for reflection.

### **C. Out of class**

Out of class you’ll read six pieces, write a paper, and memorize relevant questions in the Shorter Catechism. With respect to your reading, Southern Presbyterian Stuart Robinson will set the stage, arguing for the importance of ecclesiology from the perspectives of the divine decrees and covenants. Your main text for this course is the classic work by Scots Presbyterian James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, of which you’ll read everything but his writings on worship (assigned in the Worship class). The Edmund Clowney chapters will deal with issues related to the church, including women and office, spiritual gifts, and charismatic gifts. Irish Presbyterian Thomas Witherow presents an abbreviated presentation of presbyterian church government and a rousing case for credo- and paedobaptism. Further readings on the sacraments, especially the Lord’s Supper, comes from a favourite Dutchman, Herman Bavinck.

Recommended reading for study habits: Samuel Miller, [\*Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits\*](#), (New York: G&C Carvill, 1927), Letter VIII. Dated, but with some thoughtful points for reflection.

### **D. Class dinner**

My wife Emily would like to host you all for one evening dinner and dessert this term. This shared meal and discussion will count as the thirteenth week of class time.

## **IV. Assessment**

In addition to faithful class attendance, there are four requirements.

**A. Reading (30% of grade)** - Reading is an important part of the class. Students are expected to read all the assigned material *with reasonable care*. This means skimming does not count.

Listening to a recording of the book does not count. Reading progress will be self-reported on Canvas in **weeks 4, 8 and on the last day of class**.

**B. Quizzes (30% of grade)** – There will be three in-class quizzes during the semester, in **weeks 4, 8 and on the last day of class**. The quizzes will be based on the material covered in the classroom lectures and the required reading.

**C. Memorization (5% of grade)** – You must memorize the answers for Westminster Shorter Catechism questions 88-97. The memorization quiz will be in class on **the last day of class (May 7<sup>th</sup>)**.

**D. Research Paper (35% of grade)** – A final research paper is **DUE April 15**. The paper should be in 12pt., Times New Roman font, full justified, 1-inch margins on all sides, double-spaced, *with page numbers at the bottom*, a title at the top of the first page, with your name, class, and date on the right top of the first page. The paper should be 10-12 pages in length. Use footnotes (not endnotes) according to the SBL, or Chicago Manual of Style (or Turabian); the most important thing is to be consistent with your citation style. Your paper should include a bibliography. The title page and bibliography do not contribute to your page count, but the footnotes do.

The goal of a research paper is to state and defend an argument, demonstrating facility with academic sources and showing that you are familiar with the major arguments, including those you do not agree with. In addition to grading on content, papers will be rewarded for grammatical precision, good writing, avoidance of syntactical errors, proper formatting, and success in communicating your argument clearly and cogently.

#### *Possible Paper Topics*

- What is the proper relationship between church and state?
- How should the church relate to the culture?
- How should we view the mission of the church in light of our ecclesiology?
- How should we respond to recent innovations in contemporary church life (e.g., multisite, online church, house church)?
- What role should doctrinal standards play in the church?
- How should Christians today employ (or not) the doctrine of the spirituality of the church?
- How should the church think of the roles of men and women in the church?
- Are all the offices and gifts of the church operative today?
- What role should the sacraments play in the life of the church?
- What do we mean by the catholicity of the church? Why is it important? What should church unity entail (or not entail)?

You can do any of these topics or something related to these. Do not use material from other courses in your paper. If you choose your own topic please run it past me before getting to work. Remember, you are not just summarizing material in an academic paper. You are making an argument (with a good introduction and cogent thesis statement) that contributes to our learning and aids the reader in the pursuit of truth.

## V. Reading list

### A. Required Reading

- James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church* (unabridged eds: 1869; 1974; 1991), Introduction, Parts I-II; Part III, Division I; Part III, Division II, Subdivision IV; Part IV. Or unabridged (2015), pp. 1-338, 509-869 (700 pages).
- Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (2008), vol. 4, pp. 540-585.
- Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (1995), chs 13, 15-17 (65 pages).
- Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church* (2021), Chs 1-4, 6, 7, appendix.
- Thomas Murphy, *Pastoral Theology: The Pastor in the Various Duties of his Office* (1887; 2025), pp. 305-324.
- Stuart Robinson, *The church of God as an essential element of the gospel* (1858; 2009), Parts I-II, pp. 30-59 only (30 pages).
- Thomas Witherow, *I will build my church: Select writings on church polity, Baptism, and the Sabbath*, ed. J. Gibson (2021), pp. 81-214 (135 pages).

### B. Recommended Reading

#### 1. Ecclesiology

- D. Douglas Bannerman, *The Scripture doctrine of the Church historically and exegetically considered* (1887; 1955).
- Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (2009).
- Thomas E. Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology*.
- O.P.C., “Report of the Committee on Women in Office” (1988)
- Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, pp. 327-95, 429-86.
- William Still “[Thirty-Eight Years at Gilcomston](#)” (7 pgs).
- Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*.

#### 2. Baptism

- B.B. Warfield, “How Shall We Baptize?” *SSW* 2.329-50; “Christian Baptism,” *SSW* 1.325-331; “The Polemics of Infant Baptism,” *Studies in Theology* (=Works, Vol. 9), pp. 389-408.
- G. C. Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*.
- Pierre Marcel, *Baptism, Sacrament of the Covenant of Grace*.
- Hughes O. Old, *The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century*.
- David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham*. From a Baptist perspective.

#### 3. The Lord’s Supper

- J. A. Alexander, *God Is Love*.
- John Brown, *Discourses Suited to the Administration of the Lord’s Supper*.
- Robert Letham, *The Lord’s Supper: Eternal Word in Broken Bread*.
- Hughes O. Old, *Holy Communion in the Piety of the Reformed Church*.
- Howard Griffith, *Spreading the Feast: Instruction and Meditations for Ministry at the Lord’s Table*.
- Malcolm Maclean, *The Lord’s Supper*.
- Guy Waters, *The Lord’s Supper as the Sign and Meal of the New Covenant*

Waters and Duncan, *Children and the Lord's Supper*

4. *Reformed Systematic Theologies treating ecclesiology and sacraments*

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (4 vols.)

Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*

Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (4 vols.)

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.)

Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.)

A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*

Michael S. Horton, *Christian Faith*

John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Volume 2 [=Classroom Lectures on Theology]

Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (3 vols.; repr. in 1 vol.)

Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (3 vols.)

C. Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*.

Geerhardus Vos, *Church Dogmatics*.

## VI. Grading policies

All written work must be submitted on Canvas.

**Late work is not accepted.** If you are unable to complete an assignment on time, **please submit incomplete work instead.**

**Extensions Policy for Assignments:** In extenuating circumstances, a deadline extension of **up to one week** may be granted at the discretion of the professor. Requests for extensions of **more than one week** must be submitted to the Registrar for consideration by the Academic Dean in consultation with the professor. Extensions are granted only for significant emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, and a grade penalty may be applied. *All extension requests must be made prior to the assignment deadline.* No retrospective extensions will be granted.

Each term I will routinely choose as many as three people with whom to discuss one or more pieces of their written work. Students should expect that in this conversation I will ask about the development of their written work and discuss with the student claims made or sources used. I also reserve the right, in the event that I have any concern about AI use, plagiarism, or cheating, to substitute an oral exam for any assignment, quiz, test or exam. The length and complexity of the oral exam will depend on the scope and complexity of the assignment or assessment exercise.

For additional help understanding the grading scale or my hand-written notes, please see the file, "Grading Policies," in Canvas.

## VII. Note on computer use

I'm joining the ranks of those strongly discouraging laptop computers from class, although tablets are fine. Even the godliest, most focused student find screens a distraction, including the

screens of others. Moreover, recent research has plausibly suggested that students learn better when taking notes by hand.

If a student believes that not using a computer will cause hardship or inhibit learning, they should, of course, use their computers in class. Abuse of laptops (using them for a purpose other than note-taking) will result in my request that the laptop not be used by the student for the remainder of the semester. Unless there is an emergency, please also forebear the use of cell phones.

## Course Objectives Related to MDiv\* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Ecclesiology and Sacraments  
 Professor: Chad Van Dixhoorn  
 Campus: Charlotte  
 Date: Spring 2025

<b><u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u></b>		<b><u>Rubric</u></b>	<b><u>Mini-Justification</u></b>
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes. *As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strong</b></li> <li>• <b>Moderate</b></li> <li>• <b>Minimal</b></li> <li>• <b>None</b></li> </ul>	
<b>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</b>	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	Students must demonstrate that they have learned the material and can communicate it to others both in writing and by speaking.
<b>Scripture</b>	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Strong	The exegesis and application of Scripture is a major component in this class.
<b>Reformed Theology</b>	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	We will draw from the Reformed tradition in great detail, using classic

			texts and confessional formulations.
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	The aim of class is not just information but transformation.
<b>Worldview</b>	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Moderate	The loci covered in this class relate to all of life and godliness.
<b>Winsomely Reformed</b>	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	The student will learn the best of the Reformed tradition while dealing respectfully with a diversity of viewpoints within the church.
<b>Pastoral Ministry</b>	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	Strong	All of the ideas in the class touch on Christian worship, some very directly. Many of the theological themes covered will be immediately applicable to local church ministry. There is also a strong emphasis on understanding the church's role and mission in the world.